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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the education of West Indian immigrant students in the New York City public schools focuses on identification and assessment of this population's needs. It is noted that West Indian students represent the fastest-growing immigrant population in the city, but no educational policy has been established in the city or state to address their cultural, sociological, linguistic, or psychological needs. The result is that this population is over-represented in remedial reading, corrective speech, and special education classes. A model of additive common underlying proficiency for language learning is examined, and its implementation is recommended, with the goal of developing and using assessment instruments for better identification of the educational needs of these students. A home language identification survey and language assessment battery that measure West Indian students' grammatical, sociolinguistic (or dialectal), discourse, and strategic competence are suggested. (MSE)

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Issues of Assessment and Identification of Anglo-Caribbean Students in A Migratory Educational Environment

Paper delivered by Karl Folkes, Ph.D. at the Symposium on the Education of Students from the Caribbean where English is an Official Language

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Issues of Assessment and Identification
of Anglo-Caribbean Students in a
Migratory Educational Environment

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Abstract. This exploratory paper examines the education of immigrant West Indian students in the New York City Public Schools. As immigrants to America West Indian students represent the fastest growing immigrant population in New York City. Despite this known fact no education policy has been established by public education officials in New York City or in New York State to address their cultural, sociological, linguistic or psychological needs. The result is that these students are overly represented in remedial reading, corrective speech and special education classes. This paper examines Cummins' and Swain's (1986) "additive" common underlying proficiency model for language learning and recommends its implementation towards the goal of developing and utilizing assessment instruments for better identification of the educational needs of West Indian students.

Separated from his Caribbean milieu, the West Indian immigrant in America encounters the phenomenon of a transitional experience that is fraught with ambiguities concerning his very identity and his capability as a learner. Questions considered only rhetorically in his homeland become burning issues that are clouded in mystery in his new and unfamiliar surroundings: Who am I? What is my native language? Do I speak patios? Do I speak a dialect? Do I speak a creole? Do I speak English? Do I speak 'broken' English?

Interestingly enough, these are the same questions that American teachers (and in some cases even West Indian teachers) seek to have answered. The irony is that quite often the children, while conscious of their linguistic experience, are not usually conscious of being conscious of this experience. Unlike adults in general, young children are not likely to possess any sophisticated metacognitive awareness of their perceptions. In short, they do not ordinarily reflect on their linguistic identity.

Implications

It is argued in this paper that metacognitive awareness is essential to higher learning. This assumption is supported by field research conducted by O'Malley (1982), and Chamot and O'Malley (1986), who show that the learner performs optimally only when both metacognitive and academic language learning take place. The underlying assumption is that such a learning is made possible when background information or prior knowledge is recognized and tapped; and when this experience is filtered through use of the native language in which the learner can maximize his or her linguistic competence.

It is argued in this paper that a dialectical process to identification and assessment of the educational needs of West Indian students is essential, if the services to be provided these students are to have any relevance to their Caribbean educational preparation and background. This process is facilitated only when the teacher, as mediator of the instructional process, is able to establish contact with his or her own educational needs as an **informed** teacher by encouraging the student or learner to help guide the educational services to be provided. Such a dialectical or process approach to assessment and to teaching acknowledges the value of having the learner guide the instructional process, particularly when the learner's cultural, psychological and linguistic background is substantively different from that of the teacher who needs to be informed of this background in order to make the instruction more meaningful, relevant and effective. When the learner is of a very young age parents can play a valuable and indispensable role in serving as advisers to bridge any cultural gaps that may exist between home and school.

A Call For Open Assessment

Any kind of comprehensive assessment that is a process involving the partnership or teaming of school and home (and involving parents, teachers, guidance and counseling services, and community agencies) can be regarded as **open** assessment.

At the level of direct instruction an open assessment is a dialectical process between two involved persons — teacher and students — in which the cultural and sociolinguistic boundaries between them are not fixed or rigid, with the result that the two systems — teacher and students — have optimum opportunity to interact, change and transform themselves in relation to each other. The difficulties or confusions that ensue in the process of interaction therefore require a dynamic change in both psycholinguistic systems that are at interface in the process of classroom instruction.

In effect, the classroom teacher of West Indian immigrant children needs to develop greater social, cultural, psychological and linguistic awareness of the learner's mode of communication at all levels of language representation. On the other hand the learner needs to recognize at a conscious level that he or she possesses at least communicative competence in a language or dialect that in many ways is distinct from the target language of instruction. In short, both teacher and learner in a dialectical partnership of a compact for higher learning need to increase their metacognitive awareness of the task at hand: the acquisition of English for Anglo-Caribbean creole speaking students in a migratory linguistic environment.

In order to achieve this objective the West Indian Creole student, in a nurturing learning environment, must receive ample opportunity during classroom instruction to develop conscious awareness of the comparisons and constrasts between his or her language and that of the school. The teacher, on the other hand, must begin to recognize and appreciate the important conceptual distinction between the terms 'dialect' and 'creole'. These terms cannot be allowed to be regarded as interchangeable if ample tolerance and respect for the varied and rich cultural and linguistic background of the students are to occur.

For the purpose of this paper 'dialect' refers broadly to a language variety for which communication is still possible and maintained by people who see themselves as constituting basically the same linguistic community. In the Caribbean Basin 'creole' refers to a fully independent and autonomous language (e.g., Haitian, Jamaican, Papiamentu, Garifuna, Negerhollands) distinct from English, French, Dutch, Spanish or Portuguese, but in quasi lexical association with these languages under historical conditions of plantation economy or colonialism. As a language family a creole is purported to share a common underlying syntactic base that is of African derivation and which distinguishes it from the family of Indo-European languages. Creole shares no mutual understanding or linguistic affinity with the family of Indo-European languages.

Without a high level of tolerance or understanding on the part of the teacher or school official of the student's cultural and linguistic background four characteristic classroom responses are likely to occur:

1. The West Indian student who is poorly understood is likely to demonstrate resistance — overt or covert — to any direct instruction.

2. The classroom teacher or school official, who poorly understands the West Indian child, is likely to exhibit conflict and frustration toward the learner.

3. The student's resistance and the teacher's or school official's conflict and frustration are likely to reveal an interactive countertransference profile. That is, the negative posture of both student and teacher can be regarded as interrelated.

4. The learner's communication and the teacher's understanding of the communication process (learned as a result of his or her own introspective exercise and capacity for educational growth, development and transformation) are likely to result in the expression of strong emotions that compromise both learning of the student and educational growth and development of the teacher.

Analysis of the Problem

It is argued in this paper that West Indian students who migrate to the United States are engaged in an evolutionary and dialectical experience that can be identified by three clear stages: **a) Premigrant**, representing the educational experience in the Caribbean prior to migration to the United States, **b) migrant**, representing the transitional educational experience in the United States, and **c) postmigrant**, representing the anticipated and projected experience of assimilation and acculturation in the United States.

The migrant experience, which is current and immediate, is the experience that generally challenges us most as educators. It is the experience in which the student literally lives in the middle of two opposing experiences -- the one associated with the Caribbean and with the immediate past merging on the present, and the other associated with the United States and the intrusive and foreseeable future of assimilation and acculturation.

The migrant experience is therefore one in which the West Indian student really lives in a state of psycholinguistic paradox. This paradoxical state may be defined in psychological terms as a state of **liminality**, or living at the border, edge or precipice of perceptual awareness. The liminal state, which may last for a considerable length of time, is reinforced and maintained by contacts made with relatives and friends residing in the homeland and by occasional journey back and forth between the United States and the home country. The liminal state is often buttressed by the reading of literature from the home country and by the acquisition of its artistic, and cultural and ethnic artifacts. It is the marginal state of 'looking back' even as one goes forward.

In terms of acquisition of the target culture (that of the United States) the liminal state is the state of threshold, limen or minimal awareness. That is, the **liminar** immigrant (in particular the "recent arrival") in a state of cultural transition, is minimally aware that he is in a state of transition; nor is he fully aware of the significance or objective of this transition. A sense of great uncertainty is generally associated with the liminal state.

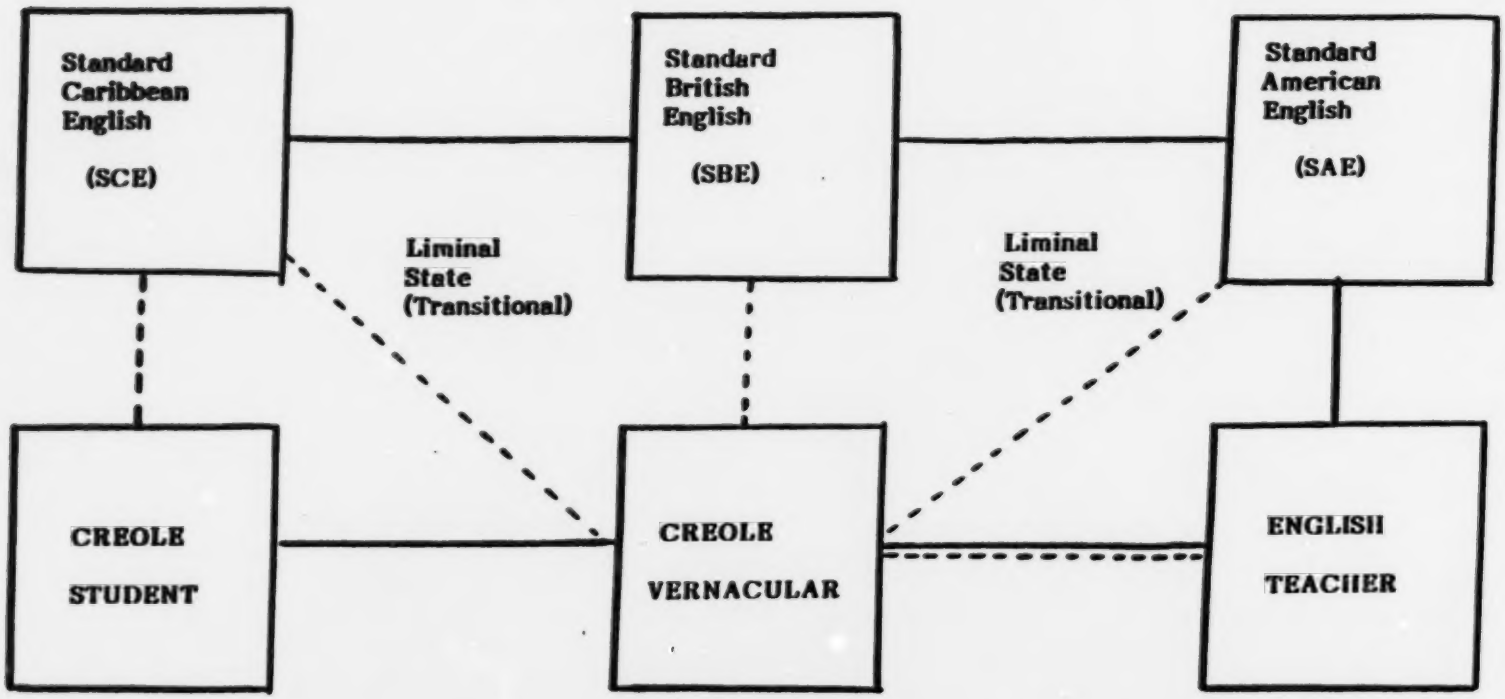
The liminal state succeeds temporally the earlier premigrant state which, in psychological language employed by Bornstein and Pittman (1992), may be described as the state of **perception without awareness** (PWA). Since this earlier state is without conscious awareness, it may be described as the **subliminal** state, or the state of subliminal perception. As applied to linguistic acquisition, the learner at the state of subliminal perception responds innately and instinctively (i.e., **natively**) to the language environment. Although he develops communicative competence in his language, he does not respond to it analytically. This process begins to occur only at the liminal or threshold state when, primarily because of formal instruction, the learner begins to grasp that he is in a phase of transition. However, even this secondary phase is without significant awareness.

Significant cognitive awareness begins only when the creole-speaking West Indian learner is afforded adequate instructional or mediated opportunity to compare and contrast his linguistic acquisition at the subliminal or premigrant state (the first language or first dialect phase of language acquisition) with his language learning at the liminal or migrant state (the second language or second dialect phase of language learning). The experience gathered at this phase is crucial, because the experience obtained is measured and filtered by both the teacher's and learner's reception of the home language (i.e., the premigrant language).

When the home language or dialect (L_1 or D_1) is distinctively different from the language taught in school, it becomes essential that both teacher and learner become consciously aware of the relationship of L_1 or D_1 to L_2 or D_2; and that L_1 or D_1 be fully recognized and accepted as an autonomous and productive language in which the learner has acquired cognitive and linguistic strategies that can be beneficial to optimum learning in the second language or dialect.

There is, however, the third or **supraliminal**, state of language learning that occurs at the postmigrant stage of language acquisition associated with acculturation and assimilation. Whereas it can be conjectured that the migrant phase may range from three to five years for West Indian students, the transition from migrant to postmigrant status may endure for several years, if not for a lifetime. This latter phase is dependent on a battery of factors, including immigration status, prior schooling, family stability and social standing, educational and professional accomplishment; and even age, gender and ethnicity.

PARADIGM OF CREOLE LIMINALITY IN A MIGRATORY CONTEXT*



*Note: This model, developed by Karl Folkes, (c) 1991, depicts liminality as the middle of three dialectal states. It is a state of sociocultural and linguistic transition, described by Schwartz-Salant & Stein (1991), citing Turner (1969), as the psychic space of the "betwixt-and-between." In a linguistic migratory context liminality is associated with the phenomenon of the "newly-arrived" immigrant. As applied to Anglophone creole-speaking Caribbean immigrant students liminality is a psycholinguistic migrant stage that is preceded by the premigrant stage of subliminal linguistic awareness and is succeeded by the postmigrant stage of supraliminal linguistic awareness.

Taken collectively the evolutionary and dialectical experience of the education of West Indian students in a migratory context may be regarded in a wholistic framework as a unitive, dynamic interactive process identified by **a)** the premigrant or subliminal phase (integrative), **b)** the migrant or liminal phase (disintegrative), and **c)** the postmigrant or supraliminal phase (reintegrative). These three phases need to be recognized and regarded **in toto** in order for anyone to assess in a comprehensive manner the educational growth and development of the West Indian immigrant learner.

The paradigm of creole liminality presented in this paper depicts the liminal state of transition encountered by the language learner in a migratory context. As has been suggested it is the state in which the West Indian learner (and perhaps most immigrant students) inhabits the disintegrative psycholinguistic space of the "betwixt-and-between."

What is Needed

Preliminary attempts to provide educational treatment to West Indian students attending public schools in the United States have focused appropriately on the development of experimental models of transitional instructional programs aimed specifically at "new arrivals" (primarily those immigrants attending U.S. public schools for fewer than three years.

Although limited funding is earmarked for this population under the Emergency Immigrant Education Act (EIEA), no specific programmatic recommendations have been made to date by New York City or by New York State for educational service to West Indian immigrant pupils. Besides, any EIEA allotment that is extended to this population is a mere pittance, especially when it is understood that this source of funding theoretically serves all immigrant populations that comprise a given local educational agency. Given the limited resources of the funding source, many of these students are seldom served by this funding; or, if served, are not served effectively.

In the meantime the West Indian immigrant population in New York City continues to grow arithmetically by leaps and bounds (conservative estimates reveal an approximate total of 28,000 identified "recent arrivals" in New York City alone). At the same time no educational policy has been set for these students. The results are unfortunate and predictable. Too many of these students are placed inappropriately in special education, remedial reading or corrective speech classes. Many drop out of school or become truants.

It is clear that more adequate measures of identification and assessment of West Indian immigrant students need to be developed. It is also clear that substantial funds need to be appropriated to identify the education needs of these students and to serve them more adequately than they are presently served.

Issues of Assessment

As a linguistic researcher Cummins (1986, p. 163) argues that "the theory of language proficiency one holds will invariably influence the way one goes about assessing it." Thus, in applying Cummins' terminology, if we argue in favor of a common underlying proficiency model (**CUP**) of dialectal or bilingual proficiency for West Indian creole-speaking students, the underlying assumption that we necessarily entertain is that the development of standard English academic skills in L_2 or D_2 is directly related to the acquisition of communicative competence in L_1 or D_1. The implication of this viewpoint is that assessment of L_2 or D_2 performance can only be meaningfully interpreted in the context of its comparison with L_1 or D_1 performance. What is sought in this instance is a comparative-contrastive assessment of the learner's language dominance (L_1) or dialect dominance (D_1) in order to develop more effective strategies for teaching and learning in L_2 or D_2.

If on the contrary, we argue in favor of a separate underlying proficiency model (**SUP**) of bidialectal or bilingual proficiency for West Indian creole-speaking students, our underlying assumption in this case is that the development of standard English academic skills in L_2 or D_2 is separated from proficiency in L_1 or D_1; and, concomitantly, that if L_1/D_1 and L_2/D_2 proficiencies are separate, then any basic interpersonal communication skills (**BICS**) acquired through L_1/D_1 cannot transfer to L_2/D_2, and vice versa.

Currently the prevailing pedagogical approach adopted at home (in the Caribbean) and abroad (in U.S. public schools) has been to deny the legitimacy of the common underlying proficiency (**CUP**) model of language acquisition in a bidialectal or bilingual environment and to employ and even enforce the separate underlying proficiency (**SUP**) model of language learning, with the implicit although erroneous understanding that L_1 or D_1 is an inferior or even a primitive, a 'broken' or 'bad' version of L_2 or D_2; hence the need to have the 'unfortunate' learner acquire a **standard** language.

In effect, the **SUP** design of language learning is posited on a deficit model which attempts to justify a pedagogical argument in favor of remedying or correcting language "deficiencies" through a remediation treatment of corrective speech, special education or 'remedial' reading classes.

Cummins (1986) has shown that there is overwhelming research which refutes the separate underlying proficiency model of language learning, despite its apparent 'intuitive' appeal. As educators our experience has confirmed that this model fails dismally when it is applied to our West Indian creole-speaking students. Thus, while it is undoubtedly acknowledged that sufficient exposure to school language is essential for the development of cognitive academic language proficiency (**CALP**), even more important is the extent to which the learner is capable of understanding the academic input to which he or she is exposed.

In the case of West Indian creole-speaking immigrant students it is argued here that L_2 /D_2 comprehension is directly related to the conceptual attributes that have developed as a result of interaction in L_1 /D_1 . From this we can infer that any formal assessment of the educational needs of West Indian immigrant students, in order to be pedagogically sound and effective, must be carried out with the underlying assumption that the development of standard English academic skills in L_2 or D_2 is, **a priori**, directly related to the acquisition of **BICS** in L_1 or D_1.

General Recommendations

In view of the fact that there is currently no policy or position paper concerning the education of Anglo-Caribbean (i.e., "West Indian") immigrant students in attendance at New York City Public Schools, any proposal that addresses the issue of assessment and identification must, of necessity, be general in scope. However, the "guidelines" set forth in this paper suggest that, as a start, we assess the learner's communicative competence in L_2 or D_2 . This competence would, in Cummins' (1986) terms, minimally include the following four areas of knowledge and skills: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic or dialectal competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

As applied to the West Indian immigrant learner grammatical competence would be understood to reflect **explicit** knowledge of the code of the target language. This knowledge would include knowledge of vocabulary and rules of word concatenation, pronunciation, spelling, and sentence formation, with due attention given to word order, word patterning, word inflections, and use of tense and aspect.

Sociolinguistic competence would be regarded in terms of dialectal competence, and would address the extent to which the learner's utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different dialectal contexts with respect to appropriateness of meaning and form through comparative-contrastive measurements. Sociolinguistic or dialectal competence would be assessed in terms of the learner's knowledge and application of dialectal ranges and "boundaries" in various language contexts. This is particularly essential, especially when the Anglo-Caribbean immigrant learners, as a linguistic entity, are representative of the variety of Anglophone creole dialects of the Caribbean Basin. Sociolinguistic competence for the West Indian immigrant learner would underscore the learner's ability to compare and contrast L_1/D_1 and L_2/D_2 production.

Discourse competence for the West Indian immigrant learner would involve mastery in the combination of grammatical forms and meanings toward the goal of achievement of a unified spoken or written text in different genres such as narrative, argumentative essay, scientific report or business letter (in effect an assessment of **spoken** or **written** competence). Cohesion in form and coherence in meaning would be sought.

Strategic competence for the West Indian immigrant learner would refer to the mastery of communication strategies through the use of paraphrase, metaphors, parody, irony, humor, amplification, etc.

Stated very broadly the four-step phase to assessment of communicative competence could be equated to assessment of general second language competence in terms of assigning L_2 learners to language levels: beginners, intermediate, advanced, transitional. These levels appear to correspond roughly to the four aspects of language assessment proposed in this paper which, to repeat, are: **a)** grammatical competence, **b)** sociolinguistic or dialectal competence, **c)** discourse competence, and **d)** strategic competence.

It is recognized that the counter argument may be made that in view of the nonexistence of an educational policy for West Indian migrant students, there is currently no assessment instrument that may be appropriate as a diagnostic tool. However, this observation supports the claim for urgent remediation of the current status.

As is necessary to emphasize, too many West Indian immigrant students receive improper instructional services such as remedial reading, corrective speech or special education services. Too few of them are identified for gifted educational services. Many fail under the current nonpolicy agenda and drop out of school.

What can be done? As a start we can administer the English version of the Language Assessment Battery, (**LAB**) to those creole-speaking West Indian immigrant students who appear to be most "at risk" of failing or dropping out of school. As an immediate strategy the reading subtest of the **LAB** may be administered to this population toward the eventual goal of the development of an L_2/D_2 comprehensive test aimed at assessing the four areas of linguistic knowledge and skills stated in this paper.

Quite naturally, it is expected that administration of this test would be used in conjunction with administration of the Home Language Identification Survey (**HLIS**), which has been in place in New York City since 1985. However, this survey would need to be revised in order for it to be responsive to the language variety environment of the Anglo-Caribbean Basin as a whole where varieties of creole include Jamaican, Guyanese, Trinidadian, Barbadian, Belizean and Lesser Antillean.

In summary, the influx of West Indian immigrant students flooding the ports of New York City, has mushroomed in the last three years. West Indian students (including Spanish-speaking students of the Dominican Republic) rank first as "new arrivals" to New York City. There appears to be no immediate end to this current trend. While Franco-Caribbean and Hispano-Caribbean students are largely served under clearly stated educational policy, guidelines and mandates, Anglo-Caribbean immigrant students are not similarly served due largely to the current lack of any educational policy to meet their specific needs. The present 'policy' of remediation services for Anglo-Caribbean students has not worked. Certainly, that is what has brought us to this second annual symposium on the education of West Indian immigrant students.

What is called for is a stated policy of comprehensive educational services of West Indian immigrant students who at present constitute a large but 'invisible' majority of the New York City public school student population. The Regents of the University of the State of New York have committed themselves to a partnership to improve educational results in New York State through "a new compact for learning". They have also established a "Regents Policy Paper and Proposed Action Plan for Bilingual Education." Despite this admirable effort, West Indian immigrant students will remain unaffected by any policy or plan that does not identify them as an educational interest group with particular educational needs.

As a long-term goal this paper recommends the development and implementation of a Home Language Identification Survey and a Language Assessment Battery that measures the West Indian immigrant student's performance in grammatical competence, sociolinguistic or dialectal competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

As an immediate and interim goal this paper recommends administration of the reading subtest of the **LAB** with the aim of placing those students performing below percentage cufoff points (to be determined) in instructional programs that apply comparative - contrastive linguistic strategies to the learning process. Such an approach would require application of Cummins' (1986) common underlying proficiency (**CUP**) model of language learning. The basic assumption that this approach would advance is that the development of standard English academic skills in L_2 or D_2 is directly related to the acquisition of communicative competence in L_1 or D_1.

Finally, it is asserted in this paper that the common underlying processes (**CUP**) model is to be preferred to the separate underlying processes (**SUP**) model, because the former is an 'additive' bilingual or bidialectal model, whereas the latter is 'subtractive' and hence pedagogically unsound.

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